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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000494

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SUBJECT: EUROPEAN COMMISSION RECOMMENDS STEP TO ENABLE  
CLOSER EU-MAURITANIAN TIES

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR JOSEPH LEBARON, REASON 1.4 (B),  
(D)

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(C) Key Points  
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-- The European Commission has recommended to the EU Council of Ministers that it closed the consultation phase of the Article 96 process under the Cotonou agreement. Such a move would allow for closer EU cooperation with the Mauritanian government.

-- According to an EU rep, the long delay in closing the consultation phase (approximately 150 days instead of the customary 120 days) is due to the lumbering EU decision-making process, and not the actions of the Mauritians.

-- The favorable recommendation comes despite the fact that the Mauritians have slipped on some of the 24 commitments they presented to the EU in October, including the selection of a redistricting method and the defining of "sound mechanisms" for the financing of political parties.

-- The EU heads of missions complained to the interior minister about census problems in the south, and got the same response that Fal gave Ambassador: no Mauritians are coming to us to complain.

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(C) Comment  
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--EU counselor Gatta has been personally outspoken in his criticism of the failures of the process both privately and in partners' meetings. However, it seems the EU intends, at least for now, to continue its support for the transitional process.

End Key Points and Comment.

¶1. (C) According to EU Counselor Bruno Gatta, his mission recently informed the Mauritians that the European Commission has recommended to the EU Council of Ministers to close the consultation phase of the Article 96 process under the Cotonou agreement, and the council will make its decision

at the end of April or early May.

¶2. (C) Gatta told DCM that this decision was reached on April 10. However, the EU mission has only now received Mauritania's updated report on progress on its 24 commitments made in October 2005. He noted wryly that in the most recent report, the Mauritaniens no longer referred to them as "commitments," but now as "points."

¶3. (C) Gatta said that while the Mauritaniens technically complied with the commitments, several key commitments promised by the end of March still have not been realized. Most significantly, the Mauritaniens have not yet chosen a method of redistricting, which would allow for a more representational make-up of the parliament (Commitment 7). While as written, the government can demonstrate it has "examined" the issue, it has not yet finalized its decision.

¶4. (C) Gatta also said that the consensus reached between the Inter-Ministerial Commission on Elections and Political Parties April 21 to expand parliament to 95 seats from the present 81 will do little to make the distribution of seats more equitable. Under the agreement, 14 seats will be given to parties proportionally according to national election results with the other 81 given to districts based on 2000 census demographics. Therefore, while less populated districts such as Bir Moghrein in the extreme north of the country (pop. 2,761) will continue to have one seat, Arafat (a suburb of Nouakchott with a population of 102,169) will only have two or three.

¶5. (C) The same is true for financing of political parties. Although committed to "defining sound mechanisms" for

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financing political parties by the end of March (Commitment 4), the transitional government has thus far only presented a proposal to political parties for discussion. A consensus has not yet been reached.

¶6. (C) Gatta said he now realizes that the Mauritaniens were "devilish" in their decision to provide as many as 24 commitments, as the international community would most likely accept slippage on such an ambitious proposal. In retrospect, the EU should have focused on just a few of the commitments and demanded clearer benchmarks for them.

¶7. (8) Gatta said that the French and Spanish Ambassadors and the German charge and he called on the interior minister to relay their concerns about reports of difficulties of the census in the south. The minister replied that the government was not receiving reports of discrimination, so could not respond. Gatta believes that the EU can go no further on this matter until the Mauritanian victims themselves start to complain, either individually or in groups.

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